

SAMPLE OP-ED

Writing and Submitting an Op-Ed

In addition to reporting the news, most newspapers publish a page of opinion columns and letters opposite the editorial page. Hence, the use of the term “opposite editorial,” or “op-ed.” Important ideas and issues are raised or debated on these op-ed pages—an ideal place to raise awareness of **National Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month (Recovery Month)** and to address important issues related to substance use disorder treatment and recovery.

Writing an op-ed puts you in the role of a columnist: expressing your views, while presenting the facts. A sample op-ed is provided at the end of this document, as well as on the enclosed CD-ROM and on the official **Recovery Month** Web site, www.recoverymonth.gov. Whether you use the sample provided as a starting point or write your own, here are some tips for writing an op-ed:

- **Develop an outline.** It will help you stay focused and act as a reminder to cover key points.
- **Express an opinion.** Be direct about your point of view from the beginning of the piece.
- **Stick to one subject.** Focus on a single theme to most effectively persuade the reader and drive home your point.
- **Use short but compelling words to get the reader’s attention; keep it simple.**
Most newspapers are written for readers at the fifth-grade level.
- **Provide background information.** Do not assume your readers are aware of the issue. Be sure to paint a broad picture of the issue or problem.
- **Support your position.** Statistics or study results add credibility—but take care not to bury your readers in numbers.
- **Use meaningful anecdotes.** Reference a recent local or national news event or story, or a personal anecdote to bring your piece to life.
- **Localize it.** Include local statistics about individuals with substance use disorders and the estimated number of children in households with people with these disorders. (A starting point for locating these statistics is the Single-State Agency Directory provided in the “Resources” section of this planning toolkit. Another good source of state-related information is the **2003 National Survey on Drug Use and Health: National Findings** published by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. This survey is available through SAMHSA’s Web site at www.oas.samhsa.gov, where state substance use data reports also are available.) Refer to local treatment facilities to emphasize that substance use disorders have a direct impact on your community.

- **Contact a *Recovery Month* planning partner from your state or local area to request a quote.** You also can include a relevant quote from another local authority or expert. A list of ***Recovery Month*** planning partners is included in the “Resources” section of this planning toolkit.
- **Keep your op-ed to no more than 500 words.** Be succinct—less is more.
- **Identify yourself.** At the end of your op-ed, include, in italics, your full name, daytime telephone number, e-mail address, and a brief description of who you are and what you do that makes you an expert on the subject.

Submitting Your Op-Ed

When planning to submit an op-ed to a local publication, it's best to start early. About two months before ***Recovery Month*** activities begin, call your local newspaper for the name of the appropriate editor to contact. Editors are often very busy, but try to take a few minutes of the editor's time to establish a rapport and explain the issue. You also can tell the editor that you are interested in submitting an op-ed during ***Recovery Month*** in September, and ask about any newspaper-specific guidelines (such as word count or submission deadlines) that you should follow.

Most newspapers designate a certain way they wish to receive op-ed submissions. They may prefer that you send it via U.S. mail, although many now accept submissions by e-mail and fax, as well. When you send your op-ed, include a cover letter that explains who you are and provides background information about ***Recovery Month***. It should be brief, explaining why your thoughts on the subject are important to the newspaper's readers. Allow the editorial staff about a week to review the piece, then place a follow-up telephone call to the editor to be sure the op-ed was received and to answer any questions.

You are encouraged to share your plans and activities for *Recovery Month* 2005 with SAMHSA's Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, your colleagues, and the general public by posting them on the official *Recovery Month* Web site at www.recoverymonth.gov.

We would like to know about your outreach efforts and community success stories during *Recovery Month*. Please complete the Customer Satisfaction Form enclosed in this planning toolkit. Directions are included on the form.

Please send any of your organization's *Recovery Month* promotional samples to:
Office of the Director, Consumer Affairs, SAMHSA's Center for Substance Abuse Treatment,
1 Choke Cherry Road, 2nd Floor, Rockville, MD 20857.

Sample *Recovery Month* materials are available electronically on the CD-ROM enclosed in this planning toolkit. For additional *Recovery Month* materials, visit our Web site at www.recoverymonth.gov or call 1-800-662-HELP.

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APPROXIMATELY 470 WORDS: PLEASE ADAPT AS NEEDED

Healing Alcohol and Drug Addiction in Our Community Takes Education, Action

For people with substance use disorders in [your city or region], starting on a road to recovery can seem impossible. Even after admitting they have a problem, people who want to overcome their addictions have many other issues to consider: How do they find available treatment programs? Will health insurance cover the costs of the services they need? Will they be able to stay on the job while seeking help?

Answering these questions can help people with substance use disorders take the first steps to get the help they need. The [name of facility] in [city] works every day to inform residents in our community that dependence on and addiction to drugs and alcohol is a disease that can be treated.

[As I know from working at one of our local treatment facilities/From my own experience], I know how discouraging it can be when help seems out of reach. Nationally in 2003, only 1.9 million persons (0.8 percent of the total population and 8.5 percent of the people who needed treatment) received treatment at a facility that specializes in treating alcohol and drug dependence and addiction, according to the *National Survey on Drug Use and Health*.

As a responsible community, we must ensure that addiction is recognized as a disease, and treated as such. We can do this by educating ourselves about the signs to look for in friends, family, and co-workers, such as a sudden decline in performance or attendance at work or school, or sudden changes in behavior or personality. We also can call upon our doctors to actively screen patients for and diagnose dependence and addiction, and ask our employers to help make treatment available.

To help in these educational efforts, [name of organization] is holding [list events/activities] this month. These efforts coincide with the 16th annual observance of *National Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month (Recovery Month)*, a nationwide initiative each September supported by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. This year's *Recovery Month* theme is “*Join the Voices for Recovery: Healing Lives, Families, and Communities.*”

Everyone can participate. Encourage community-based organizations to create forums for working together on local treatment goals, including providing support for the families of people with substance use disorders. Volunteer at or donate to local recovery groups.

Help educate people with substance use disorders and their family members about treatment options and support services. Spread the word about employee assistance programs that can guide people into recovery while still maintaining their jobs.

By educating yourself and others about solutions to substance use disorders, you are joining the voices for recovery and helping to heal lives, families, and our community.

To find out more about this issue or the events being held in your local community, visit www.recoverymonth.gov and get involved.

[Your full name] is [insert your title/affiliation or other role in the substance use disorder field].